

News and Information

from the Tennessee Division of Consumer Affairs

615.741.4737 or toll-free 800.342.8385

www.state.tn.us/consumer

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CONTACT:

Chris Allen

Dave McCollum

Weekly Column by David McCollum, Director Volume 1, Issue 3

Telling Telemarketers to Hang It Up

It's 7:30 on a Tuesday evening, and you're relaxing in your recliner watching your favorite sitcom when the phone rings. You pick it up, say "hello," and wait a few seconds for the person on the other end to respond. That delay lets you know that you're dealing with a telemarketer. They often use computers to dial more than one number at a time, then make their pitch to whoever answers first. Lucky you.

It then takes that person a second or two to make sure they have the correct name before they continue. That delay is your first opportunity to hang up and avoid the unwanted sales pitch. If you're still on the line when the telemarketer finds your name in the database, you'll receive an earful right away. Most telemarketers work from a script, reading it verbatim. You don't have to let them finish. It's your house and your phone; you are in charge. Just hang up.

If you happen to be inclined to hear their pitch, be on guard for scams. You may be offered a prize or other "free" incentive. Listen carefully, because you'll probably be required to buy something or attend a sales presentation to get that "free" item. Most of these items are not remotely as valuable as the time you would have to invest to receive them. Politely decline and resume watching your syndicated episode of Seinfeld or whatever you were doing.

Be wary of travel offers as well. The "low-price" travel packages often come with high cost hidden fees that cancel out the discount. Worse yet, the trip may never happen. If you bite on a travel scam, you could find yourself standing on a dock all dressed up with no place to go and a few hundred dollars lighter in the wallet.

The best way to avoid all this hassle is to get on the State's Do Not Call list. This is a list of phone numbers that telemarketers, by law, are not allowed to call. Call the Tennessee

Regulatory Authority toll-free at 1-877-872-7030 and have your number added. It only takes a few seconds, and it will save you a lot of time in the long run.